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SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU ASSASSINATIONS UPDATE

REF: DAKAR 263

Classified By: Classified by AMB Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In the calm following the assassinations of Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai and President Joao Bernardo Vieira, the Bissau-Guinean military leadership continues to insist they want no role in governing the country. The interim President, Raimundo Pereira, was sworn in on March 3 and pledged to hold presidential elections within 60 days. Military personnel reportedly continue to pursue Vieira loyalists in hopes of exacting further revenge. The state funerals for both men, planned for March 7, are meant to begin a period of national reconciliation. While tragic, the deaths may represent a crucial window of opportunity for Guinea-Bissau by allowing the country to strengthen progress made toward democratization in the past two successful elections, potentially ushering in an era of civilian control of the military, and security sector reform. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) In the aftermath of the March 1 assassination of General Na Wai and the March 2 retaliatory killing of President Vieira, representatives from the Bissau-Guinean armed forces continue to eschew political control of the country, insisting that the country remains under civilian leadership. On March 2, in a sign of deference, military leaders traveled to the office of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior to reportedly assure Gomes that the military had no desire to rule the country. Following the meeting, Gomes made a brief public statement in demonstration of his continued leadership.

¶3. (SBU) In a March 3 ceremony before the National Assembly, Raimundo Pereira, the heretofore National Assembly president, was sworn in as the interim president of the country. In accordance with the constitution, Pereira has 60 days to hold new presidential elections. Likely candidates include businessman and former interim president Enrique Rosa (reportedly the preferred candidate of Prime Minister Gomes) and former President Kumba Yala (leader of the Party of Social Renewal (PRS) and de facto political leader of the Balanta ethnic group which dominates the armed forces). Sources suggest that Gomes does not aspire to the presidency, preferring to remain as Prime Minister. National Assembly 1st Vice-President Serifo Nhamadjo assumed the presidency of the parliament pending Pereira's return to the legislative body.

¶4. (SBU) Throughout March 3, normalcy returned to the streets of Bissau. The airport and borders reopened and automobile traffic flowed relatively freely in Bissau as military checkpoints came down. Banks, which closed Monday and Tuesday due in part to fear of potential looting from members

of the armed forces, are set to reopen March 4. Television and radio resumed broadcasting in the evening of March 2, albeit with scant reporting on current events and a shortened broadcast schedule.

¶15. (C) Although conflicting reports persist about who is controlling the military, most suggest that no single individual is stepping forward to replace Na Wai as the Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Instead, the military is being run by an ad hoc committee of the Army, Navy and Air Force Chiefs of Staff. Sources also agree that Naval Captain Zamora Induta overstepped his authority when he informed the press that he was the new Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Diplomatic and senior Senegalese military sources characterized Induta as a self-aggrandizing opportunist. According to the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), battalion commanders in Mansoa, Buba and Gabu are exerting strong influence over the military as well.

¶16. (C) In a meeting with the Deputy Chief of Mission and head of the Office of Security Cooperation, the Senegalese Chief of Staff, General Abdoulaye Fall, noted that Na Wai had the rare ability to span the ethnic, generational and political cleavages that cut across the Bissau-Guinean military and characterized Na Wai as a stabilizing force.

¶17. (C) There are indications that members of the Armed Forces are now calling into question Vieira's role in the assassination of Na Wai, given that Vieira made no attempt to protect himself in the aftermath of Na Wai's death. Reportedly, Vieira met with the chiefs of the armed services and the Minister of Defense late on March 1 to assure them

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that he had no role in the general's death.

¶18. (C) Despite any doubts about Vieira's involvement in the death of Na Wai, several sources indicate that military personnel are reportedly vigorously pursuing a handful of Vieira loyalists who have gone into hiding. Media reports and sources indicate that the current Minister of Territorial Administration, Baci Dabo, has sought refuge at the local UN compound. Other Vieira loyalists allegedly wanted by the military include Joao Cardoso, the former head of Vieira's Office and top advisor, Adolfo Martins, head of presidential protocol, Joao Monteiro, from the state intelligence agency, Cipriano Cassama, the former Minister of Interior responsible for standing up a presidential guard force in December 2008 against Na Wai's wishes, and Helder Proenca, Vieira's preferred but unsuccessful candidate for the January election of the National Assembly president. Sources suggest that the military will execute the Vieira loyalists if apprehended.

¶19. (C) Conflicting reports surround the whereabouts of former President Kumba Yala. Yala's passport was returned to him in January when he was allowed to travel to his second home in Morocco for medical reasons. If he surreptitiously returned to Bissau, he has avoided any public appearances. After some discussion, Senegalese military officials believed Yala is in Guinea-Bissau. On March 2, PRS officials vehemently condemned the barbaric acts surrounding the two assassinations.

¶10. (SBU) Vieira's wife, Isabel Vieira, is reported to be in good condition and is awaiting, reportedly, her husband's burial before accepting asylum in Portugal. The two state funerals for the men will be held on Saturday, March 7.

¶11. (SBU) Post sent out a warden message during the morning of March 2 to all registered Americans in both Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, informing them of the situation and advising caution. At present, Dakar ACS has identified 31 American citizens currently in Guinea-Bissau, of which four are tourists. All 31 people have been accounted for either directly by phone or indirectly through our contacts.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: While tragic, the deaths may represent a potentially positive turning point for the country and a window of opportunity for the USG and international community to help shape the future of Guinea-Bissau. This view is shared by many Bissau-Guineans and observers, according to anecdotal evidence, even though they were shocked by the violent events. Barring a sudden and dramatic change in the posture of military leaders, Guinea-Bissau appears to have avoided a coup d'etat in the aftermath of the assassinations of Vieira and Na Wai. With the appropriate assistance, Prime Minister Gomes and the next president could establish effective civilian control over the military, pursue much needed security sector reform, and begin to seriously combat narcotics trafficking.

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